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A WOMAN'S PLACE by Marie Brant (Selma James)

WOMEN'S INDUSTRIES

Most of the places for women to work in Los Angeles are small TV and radio shops. The work is usually intricate wiring and soldering. Some of it requires a magnifying glass to see what you're working on.

Like any other places in LA, there are people from all over the country, some from midwestern and southern farms, grandmothers to young girls just out of school on their first jobs. The women run around with their own groups, those who have the same interests, on breaks and at lunch. On the line itself, age, nationality and background don't matter. When the bell rings, everybody runs for the clock. They walk in. They run out.

Nobody talks politics unless something unusual happens. The daily papers are discussed only when there is a kidnapping or big divorce case or when something like the "I Love Lucy" programme is news. They feel that there is nothing they can do about what the politicians are doing, and it just upsets you to think about it. There is a similar attitude to unions.

Most of these radio shops are AF of L (American Federation of Labor). But the only way you know there is a union is by the dues taken out of your cheque. When you hire in, the personnel man usually has that apologetic tone in his voice when he tells you that you have to join the union in order to get the job. Nobody is that interested in joining.

It's the same all over, but in places like LA, it's worse. The unions were imported here from the east. The women working now didn't help to build them. They get them ready made. And by the time they got them, everything they had stood for once, the unions had lost.

The guys in shipping or in the tool crib remember the unions
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when they represented something. They have in them the tradition of what the word, union, once meant and how people fought to establish them. They still have hopes it will in some way go back to what it was.

Some say the unions are as they are because there are so many women working and women don't know how to stick together. That is just not true. If women thought that the union could do any good, they would be as active or more active than the men, who aren't very active anyway. The word, union, to the women, is as dirty a word as politics.

Many women are new to plants and plants are new to them. But they are there to stay. They are free of tradition. There is no past, just the present. They judge unions on what they are now. You join like you are hired. Your dues are paid before you get your cheque. You leave it when you quit or are laid off. It doesn't belong to you. It belongs to the job. All the women see is the difference between what they are supposed to be and what they are.

The company runs the job. They get orders mixed, blueprints jumbled, the wrong wire, cheap solder. That is what creates the strain and makes such physically light work exhausting. There is no way for the women to bring what they know about their work to be a force in the plant and to change the stupid and inhuman way the company runs things.

The women want and feel the need for some kind of organization, but they don't look to the unions. If something comes up, they handle it among themselves, at their own tables and in their own groups. Only once do I remember a grievance being taken to the union and then "just to let them know we're still alive." Until they see the possibility of organizing on a plant-wide basis and getting results, they will remain in their own groups, representing themselves as much as possible. They are accomplishing more by taking care of day-to-day problems right on the line than ~~trying~~^{by} to save a tradition.